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German Prisoners of War in the United States

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WHEN the United States entered World War II, the problem of maintaining enemy prisoners of war was among the last considerations of a country reeling from a Japanese attack and feverishly tooling up for a war in Europe. Yet, by the end of the war, America found itself holding nearly a half million Axis POWs evacuated from battle areas an ocean away, had placed them in existing or hastily constructed camps across the country, and had dealt with a tangled web of problems involving feeding, clothing, securing, registering, interrogating, entertaining, and even re-educating the prisoners.

Because the United States had not held large numbers of foreign prisoners in well over 100 years, when British soldiers were interned in 1812, past experiences could provide little guidance. The remaining alternative was the Geneva Accords of 1929, a plethora of conventions which, although ratified by 40 nations by 1939, was still an untried document whose application had to be tested at every step. Thus, when the war broke out, the War Department, acting through the Provost Marshal General, synthesized the Geneva Convention into two fundamental principles which formed the foundation for all future treatment of prisoners of war. They were, first, that the Geneva Convention was a humanitarian document intended to prevent indignities against enemy soldiers simply because they had suffered the misfortune of having been taken prisoner; and second (and more important), that the enemy nations held their own share of American soldiers who were to be protected by the United States through decent treatment of enemy prisoners.

Other than basic principles, however, in 1941, America was in no way prepared for the more than 425,000 German and Italian prisoners of war that would inundate the country between the springs of 1943 and 1945.¹

America's single year of planning came to a close as the Allies opened their North African campaign in November 1942, and the subsequent defeat of Rommel's army sent the numbers of incoming prisoners soaring. The first massive group of German and Italian prisoners captured by American and British forces totalled more than 150,000 men (including the prize catch,

General Jurgen von Arnim, Rommel's successor as Commander of the Afrika Korps), and between May and October 1943, an average of 20,000 prisoners a month arrived in the United States.²

From December 1943 through the following June, the monthly figures dropped to 2,000, and although the period following the Normandy invasion saw the Western Allies taking prisoners at the rate of 100,000 per month, the liberation of France allowed many of them to be maintained outside of the United States. From June through December 1944, the number of prisoners transferred stateside averaged 30,000 per month, with a surge of more than 60,000 prisoners arriving during April and May 1945 alone. Despite the growing demand from a number of congressional and government officials to transfer even more POWs to help relieve the farm labor shortage in the United States,³ the War Department announced that such shipments of prisoners to American camps would cease on V-E Day. The total number of Axis prisoners in the United States at the end of May 1945 was to be 371,683 Germans, 50,273 Italians, and 3,915 Japanese.⁴

Despite the planning period through 1942, American unpreparedness to deal with so large a number of foreign prisoners was reflected at the onset by the government's inefficient division of responsibility: division between the War Department, charged with guarding, feeding, and housing the prisoners, and the State Department, charged with negotiations for their repatriation via neutral actions. The War Department, in turn, reassigned some responsibilities to the Army Service Forces, headed by Gen. Brehm Somervell, which, in turn, controlled the Office of the Provost Marshal General, under Maj. Gen. Allen Gullion. The State Department, meanwhile, established an Internees Section in the Office of Special War Problems Division. To complicate the situation still further, the Provost Marshal General's Office was responsible for the Aliens Division, the reorganization of which, in June 1943, finally led to the creation of the Prisoner of War Division, under the direction of the extremely able new Assistant Provost Marshal General Brig. Gen. Blackshear M. Bryan. Policy decisions, therefore, were rerouted through several administrative

levels, any one of which might have had a different opinion or interpretation, causing confusion and delay which would not be eliminated until June 1945, when a final reorganization provided for the Provost Marshal General to report directly to the Commanding General of the ASF as a full staff advisor.⁵ In 1942, however, General Bryan's first job was to establish camps to contain the sudden and seemingly unending deluge of arriving enemy prisoners.

Following their capture in the field, enemy prisoners entered a confusing maze of registration procedures. They were assigned numbers, fingerprinted, photographed, given medical attention, interrogated for military information, given receipts for nonessential personal property, and placed aboard available ocean transport to the United States — a normally difficult process made more difficult by a lack of German and Italian-speaking G.I.s as well as deliberate enemy efforts to hamper accurate registration.⁶

The Provost Marshal General's office authorized the creation of two types of camps: permanent camps and branch camps,⁷ numbering 141 and 319, respectively, by May 1945. The strong emphasis on security affected both the location and construction of the camps, for the War Department stipulated that the camp sites be isolated and easily guarded, and away from 'black-out areas' which extended 150 miles in from the Mexican and Canadian border, 75 miles inland from both coasts, or near shipyards or vital war industries. For these reasons, as well as a lack of available funds for new construction, it was necessary that permanent camps, whenever possible, would be located at or near existing military bases, two-thirds of which were located in the South and Southwest; the capacity of each camp ranged between 1,000 and 5,000 men, averaging 2,500. Because the Geneva Convention required that the structure of prisoner camps should approximate those for troops at base camps of the retaining power, the standard layout for the construction of nearly 50 new camps was as follows:

The camp consists of one or more compounds surrounded by two wire fences . . . and compounds are separated from each other by a single fence. Each compound houses four

companies of prisoners, or approximately 1,000 men. The facilities consist of five barracks, a latrine, a mess hall, and an administration building for each company. In addition, each company is provided with a recreation building, an infirmary, a workshop, a canteen building . . . a chapel, and a station hospital.⁸

Moreover, the Geneva Accords required that food, sanitary, and health services were not only to be adequate, but prisoners were to receive the same treatment as members of the American armed forces.⁹ To insure that such conditions were maintained, inspection teams were commissioned to report on the conditions of the POWs to the responsible American and Swiss authorities at regular intervals.

ALL camps were guarded, of course, by military personnel, which grew to 47,000 in number, and it was deemed vital to American interests that the prisoners' contact with American personnel and way of life result in a positive attitude. Competent personnel, however, were in short supply due to the overseas priorities, and the Army Service Forces often utilized its least necessary (or qualified) personnel — recently retired officers, or those destined for a terminal or “dead-end” appointment. This produced a situation which, as official ASF historian John Millett noted, caused prison camp commands . . . to be the dumping ground . . . for field grade officers who were found to be unsatisfactory.”¹⁰

The shortage of qualified personnel, complicated by the critical lack of German and Italian-speaking administrators, a general hostility by American enlisted personnel towards the prisoners, and the over-all belief that their efforts were being wasted stateside while “the action” was taking place overseas, led to a morale problem which was finally brought to the public attention in late 1944 by the respected James H. Powers of the *Boston Globe*. His sharp criticism that the situation involved a test of national will for which American personnel were “less than proficient,”¹¹ astonishingly brought agreement from Bernard Gufler of the State Department Special War Problems Division, who stated that, indeed, “no effort seems to have been made to train either the officers or the guard personnel for their highly specialized work,” and that the prisoners often were exposed to the most comic and least efficient side of their captors.¹² Although there is no accurate measure of these criticisms, the War Department and, in particular, the Provost Marshal General's Office launched an immediate series of conferences for ASF service commands in 1943 and 1944 (of questionable value), created three-week training programs beginning in October 1944, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and Fort

Custer, Michigan, and prepared a reference manual on prisoner of war administration (far more successful).¹³ Once settled, the prisoners were ready for work.

The forced labor of captive enemy personnel has been a time-honored practice, and although the Geneva Convention did not prevent their employment, it did restrict them to certain general areas. Placed under the direction of the War Manpower Commission and the War Food Administration within the War Department, the issue of prisoner employment simply directed that a prisoner must be physically able, that the work in question must not be dangerous or unhealthy, and that no work project could be directly related to the war effort. Pay scales were adjusted to rank, and although officers were not obligated to work, most elected to fill at least supervisory positions. All enlisted personnel received 10¢ a day, plus an additional 70¢ per day for any work above and beyond their required maintenance of the prison camp. Officers were harnessed to a sliding scale: lieutenants received \$20.00 per month; captains, \$30.00 per month; and majors through generals, \$40.00 per month, with or without labor. The strict distinction made by the Geneva Convention between the care of enemy officers and enlisted men required the American authorities to provide German officers the same quality quarters, staff, and military courtesy as the captive power accorded its own officers. German officers above the rank of captain, for example, were allowed an orderly from among the prisoners; all officers to the rank of major were allowed individual bedrooms; majors and above were provided with separate living rooms; and generals were given individual huts. The War Department even created an accounting system for the thrifty, and prisoners were allowed to withdraw their savings at the end of their captivity.

Paid labor existed in two basic forms: at American installations and related stations, and as labor contracted to private business. Maj. Maxwell S. McKnight, Prisoner of War Division, assured the anxious American public that such work involved no danger to the war effort, and that “every effort is made to employ prisoners at work in connection with military reservations because it is the most satisfactory and economical means of utilizing their labor . . . [and] prisoners are used to displace American troops whenever possible.”¹⁴ Those prisoners not employed at military posts were contracted out to private business, farms, and small industries. Prompted by the spectre of domestic labor shortages in late 1943, Secretary of War Stimson arranged for local industries to apply for POW work details through military channels, and labor battalions were farmed out to brick plants, dry cleaning

plants, as mechanics, for harvesting and land clearance projects, and ironically to a New Jersey kosher meat-packing house. Local communities and businesses quickly adjusted to the “familiar spectacle of columns of gray or denim-clad POWs swinging along in the precise, easy rhythm achieved only by men familiar with marching since childhood.”¹⁵

Despite the apparent ease with which the prisoners accepted their tasks, the official *Handbook for Work Supervisors of Prisoner of War Labor* (Army Service Forces Manual, M 811, July 1945) exhorted American work supervisors to “be aloof, for the Germans respect firm leadership . . . Allow them to rest only when necessary. *DRIVE!* (p. 15) By 5 April 1945, the *New York Times* was able to report that of the 365,437 POWs currently held in the United States, nearly 200,000 of them were employed in jobs outside of the military sector.

A number of complications did arise, however, not the least of which was the ire of American labor unions. The War Department quickly became the object of an organized protest after German prisoners were detailed to work on the railroads. American railroads were, and still are, the most unionized industry in the nation, and the War Department found itself at loggerheads with the powerful Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. George Harrison, President of the Union, carried on a vociferous campaign, at one point declaring of Secretary Stimson:

My God, does he not know that Railroading is a most delicate operation . . . We carry on night and day in split second schedules. I have not been able to get a reason for turning loose Nazi soldiers, skilled in demolition practices, so that they may run amuck on the railroads.¹⁶

The Roosevelt Administration, wary of further labor unrest, decided against detailing prisoners to heavily unionized segments of the working front, and contracts were thereafter more carefully considered. The net result in retrospect, was that the German prisoners were generally employed in jobs requiring little or no technical skill, a gross waste of valuable, cheap, and legal labor.

A second difficulty arose with the fall of fascist Italy and its subsequent shift to the Allied side. In order to remedy the embarrassment of imprisoning the then Allied troops, the United States declared all Italian POWs, 53,607 in number, as “co-belligerents,” a definition which stipulated that although the Italian captives could not be released, at the same time the United States could continue custodial care without the restrictions of the Geneva Convention. Henceforth, Italian prisoners would be utilized for jobs which were otherwise pro-

hibited to German and Japanese prisoners. Between June 1943 and 31 March 1944, POWs put in 10,300,321 man-days of work, of which 12,298,165 man-days were in private business. In June 1945, Brigadier General Bryan was able to announce to the House Committee of Military Affairs that:

The labor of prisoners of war to date on military establishments is valued at above \$80,000,000. In addition, contractors have paid into the United States Treasury \$22,000,000 in cold cash. This money has been deposited in the miscellaneous receipts fund in the Treasury. In effect, this represents a deduction from the cost of maintaining and guarding the prisoners of war.¹⁷

Once the process of camp life and the division of labor had been settled, attention turned to the political and ideological framework within the camp.

ARTICLE 4 of the Geneva Convention solemnly declared that “differences in treatment among prisoners is lawful only when it is based on the military rank, state of physical or mental health,” thereby making no distinction between ideologically hardened prisoners and those who are “re-educated.” Although neither the Soviet Union nor Great Britain took the Geneva Convention seriously enough to handicap their own programs, the United States applied its provisions wholesale to all situations. The central problem involved the American failure to take advantage of the critical period immediately following the prisoners’ capture. The first several weeks are critical, because military prisoners are dazed, disrupted, and display a universal vulnerability. It is at this moment that the prisoner must be interrogated, segregated by political persuasion, processed, and assigned to a camp — yet it was precisely at this point that American concern with the prisoner’s mental and political condition ceased. Only the most basic division of captives took place. First, Navy prisoners were separated from Army prisoners, and then officers were segregated from enlisted men. The most visibly rabid Nazis, 4,500 by 1945, were interned at Alva, Oklahoma, and the most visibly dedicated anti-Nazis, 3,300 in number, were shipped to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and Camp Campbell, Kentucky.¹⁸ Although a massive program was later initiated to “democratize” the prisoners, the best opportunity to segregate the various shades of political ideology had passed, and totalitarian reinforcement was allowed to take place.¹⁹

As an initial result, the influence over the German prisoners was wielded in large part by hard-core Nazis. According to Article 43 of the Geneva Convention, the camp

at large was obligated to appoint representatives to deal with camp administrators and inspection teams on its behalf, an opportunity seized most often by the more aggressive Nazis. Instead of interfering with the work program, the Nazi-dominated camps, in fact, were usually models of efficiency. The Nazis realized that an orderly and well-run camp would give them the continued backing of the American authorities, and, therefore, the real control over the camp. As a result, they were given an almost free hand, and without an effective intelligence system and adequate guidelines, the War Department moved slowly to counter their influence.²⁰

The success obtained by the Nazis within the camps often created a totalitarian environment in the prisoner system, a conclusion substantiated by a Harvard University study, headed by Prof. Warren A. Seavey, which warned that “United States policy in prisoner’s camps was only serving to strengthen Nazism among the captives.”²¹ Similar sentiments were echoed, interestingly, by an anti-Nazi prisoner in Camp Campbell, Kentucky, in a November 1944 memo to the Executive Officer of the camp. “I take this unusual step of writing this letter, as it was impossible to see you,” wrote one Pvt. Friedrich Schiltz, 8WG-25509. “I am told that you don’t like anti-Nazis, but I appeal to your fairness” He went on to say:

I acknowledge that a snappy behavior looks nice, machine-like. You feel it is like a good running motor, smooth and dependable. But it is all facade . . . Those who are your enemies are respected. Those who had to fight against you as they had no other choice, and who flock to you for protection, who work for your victory, which means their victory, these are contemptible. Why?²²

To these, and a number of other charges that the United States was encouraging Nazism rather than eliminating it,²³ Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson admitted that

Occasionally, groups of Nazi prisoners have attempted to dominate their fellow prisoners, but . . . there has been substantial success in curtailing the activities of such minorities and in preventing coercion of prisoners by Nazi extremists . . . The War Department is cognizant of the problems created by Nazi elements in our camps, and every effort is being made . . . I therefore feel that there is no necessity for an investigation²⁴

Secretary Stimson’s optimism aside, there is no doubt that Nazi elements controlled the internal affairs of many prisoner of war camps, and it appears ironic that exactly four months after Stimson’s rejection of

Seavey’s proposed investigation of the situation, the War Department, in response to a German memorandum via Switzerland, reintroduced the Nazi salute as an accepted greeting within POW camps. The War Problems Division memorandum to camp commanders explained that

The new salute has, of course, distinct Nazi implications but so have the Swastika on German uniforms and decorations which the prisoners of war are allowed to display

We might be able to gain some advantages: personnel can endeavor to keep careful track of the prisoners who seem to be enthusiastic about the Nazi salute . . . a count of Nazi noses could thus become possible

The Nazi salute should not be made fun of or commented on by American guard personnel within hearing of the prisoners of war. The best way of treating it would seem to be the old fashioned American poker-faced method. In the course of time many prisoners will tend to get tired of it²⁵

The final complication regarding the political leadership within the camps, and perhaps the most significant, concerns the fact that the first large body of prisoners to arrive in the United States, and consequently, those around whom the camp structures were designed and those to whom all later arrivals would be forced to submit, were the most thoroughly indoctrinated Nazis. “The first captives from North Africa,” wrote the Harvard historian, Sidney Fay,

were a tough lot — the toughest of any group of German prisoners — partly because they had waged a remarkably heroic though unsuccessful campaign . . . while the quality of German prisoners taken later in France is very different, middle-aged and not so fanatically Nazi²⁶

These elite members of the Afrika Korps, rigidly disciplined and admired by their fellow prisoners and American guards alike as the cream of the German military machine, doggedly maintained their belief, to the last days of the war, that Germany would emerge victorious. Although there is sufficient evidence to indicate that such prisoner attitudes were by no means universal, the political atmosphere within the camps would make later plans to “democratize” the prisoners that much more difficult. The authorities were not oblivious to the degree of Nazi activity flourishing within the camps, of course, yet little recourse was taken unless a captive volunteered and petitioned to be placed in a special purged camp — admission to which was exceedingly slow and dangerously public.

One of the results of this lack of common

sense in dealing with German POWs was a reign of violence which lasted approximately eight months, from September 1943 to April 1944, by the rather large segment of fanatical Nazis. Within that period, 6 murders, 2 forced suicides, 43 "voluntary" suicides, a general camp riot, and hundreds of localized acts of violence occurred in a number of camps. In every instance, investigation by Army authorities pointed directly to the influence of hard-core Nazis, which followed a pattern that saw the prisoners "accused by their comrades of anti-Nazi activities, sentenced by kangaroo courts, and hanged, beaten, or coerced to death by Gestapo methods."²⁷ In many cases, the suspects could only be thrown into the camp stockade for punishment; but in cases where stronger evidence existed, they were shipped to a special camp for "hard cases" at Alva, Oklahoma. In cases where the evidence was conclusive, or the crimes particularly brutal, the POWs were court-martialed and sent to a federal penitentiary.²⁸ The American authorities pointed out, however, that the ratio of homicide and suicide among the prisoners of war was still lower than among any given segment of the American population at large, a rationalization which, of course, begged the question of basic POW control.

A related issue to camp violence and POW control, and one which caused some public concern, was that of prisoner escapes. From 21 April 1942, when the first prisoners arrived in the United States, to the end of the war three years later there were a total of 1,583 escapes. The establishment of the camp work programs involved the calculated risk of minimum security in an effort to free the greatest number of Army personnel for combat overseas, and a small number of escapes was considered acceptable. The average monthly escape rate from June 1944 to August 1945, however, was over 100, or an average of 3 to 4 escapes per day. The largest and most publicized mass escape occurred on Christmas Eve, 1944, when 25 German POWs escaped through a 250-foot tunnel from their camp at Papago Park, Arizona. Although every man was recaptured within three weeks, the cry raised by the public prompted a Congressional hearing by the Committee on Military Affairs. Fanned by alarmist newspaper reports, and a continued cry by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that "an escaped prisoner of war, trained as he is in the technique of destruction, is a danger to our internal security, our war production, and the lives and safety of our citizens,"²⁹ national attention focused on the POW situation. Despite the fact that the majority of prisoners escaped for reasons no more sinister than boredom, that nearly every escapee was rounded up within two weeks, and that not a single inci-

dent of sabotage by an escaped prisoner is on record, General Bryan was called to account for the Army's policies of "laxity, inexperience, and lack of safeguards."³⁰ Perhaps the only beneficial effect produced by these chaotic events was the War Department's long-belated decision to initiate education and recreation programs for the prisoners.

Secretary Stimson objected to these plans on the grounds that a new aggressive educational program would divert manpower from the war effort, create hostility among the prisoners, and perhaps even jeopardize the safety of any participant upon his repatriation. But the able head of the Special Projects Division, Lt. Col. Edward Davison, overcame Secretary Stimson's objections and finally received permission to inaugurate the program in total secrecy.

Beginning cautiously with the reelection of prisoner representatives by secret ballot as an experiment in democracy, the educational experiment was launched with the distribution of books banned by Hitler (and the banning of books by German authors deemed "undemocratic"), followed by the distribution of books determined to be representative of the American spirit, like *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* and *The Life of Alexander Graham Bell*. Attendance at all lectures was optional, with the exception of mandatory attendance at German atrocity films, the "Why We Fight" series, and other War Department and OWI films. Despite the many high hopes that the camps would become classrooms of democracy,³¹ attendance by the prisoners was admittedly light and skeptical — a skepticism not entirely confined to the prisoners alone. "It is not our business to change these men's habits or beliefs or to re-educate them," an American officer candidly admitted, "this company simply has a job to do."³²

It finally became obvious to Army authorities that a careful screening would have to be initiated if coercion by the hardened Nazis upon their less ideological comrades were to be overcome, and Maj. Gen. Archer L. Lerch, Provost Marshal General, began the long-overdue process of testing and interrogation. The first category, 13 percent of the prisoners, contained hardened Nazis and sympathizers, labelled "blacks," who were simply ignored as incorrigibles; 74 percent, in the second category, were labelled "gray," those who had simply followed along — the ones at whom the educational program was aimed; and finally the "whites," in the third category, not less than 13 percent, whose records indicated that they had previously opposed the Nazi regime. It was not until V-E Day that the educational program was publicly disclosed, and the program continued until the beginning of their repatriation in April 1946. Despite a few descrip-

tions of failure, more than 23,142 "whites" were graduated to return to Germany as potential leaders under the Allied occupation, to initiate "government in Germany that we can trust, which means that we must have people heading it that we can trust."³³

In summarizing the project to "democratize" German prisoners, Col. Alpheus Smith, commanding officer of the program at Fort Eustis, Virginia, stated that

Maybe this is doing some good. It certainly isn't doing any harm and it isn't costing the taxpayers a nickel . . . Twenty-five years from now maybe we'll know whether we have failed or succeeded . . .³⁴

Unfortunately, no post-war study has ever been conducted to measure that success or failure.

As the war drew to a close, the question of repatriation became a central issue. Long before the end of the war, prisoner exchanges had taken place in compliance with Articles 68 and 69 of the Geneva Convention, which requires the sick and seriously wounded to be repatriated as soon as their conditions allow them to be moved. Yet, as the end of hostilities in Europe approached, the United States found itself torn between two opposing arguments: those who urged immediate repatriation of prisoners and those who urged that the prisoners be retained in the country for labor. An editorial in the *Washington Post* summarized the arguments warning that "to send the German prisoners home at the cessation of hostilities or soon thereafter seems highly impracticable and even dangerous . . . [yet] . . . the drafting of prisoners for forced labor would be a violation of the spirit and letter of the Geneva Convention."³⁵ There were additional arguments from other quarters. Some groups lobbied for the use of prisoners as cheap labor; and organized labor demanded their immediate repatriation for the same reason. The only agreement reached by all parties was summarized by one Army spokesman who stated that regardless of the date of their repatriation, "while they're in this country we'll work the hell out of them."³⁶

The final decision came from the War Department in June 1945, announcing that prisoners would be repatriated according to certain priorities: sick and wounded first, cooperative prisoners second, and hostile elements last, depending on the availability of shipping and civilian labor to replace POW labor in the United States. In sharp contrast to this decision, France, Britain, and Russia, motivated by the desperate need for raw labor and no small amount of revenge against Nazi Germany, continued to hold more than five million Ger-

man prisoners for nearly three years after V-E Day — and the Soviet Union has astonishingly ignored, to date, all international appeals to release the untold numbers of survivors.

Repatriation began officially in July 1945, and although only 70,000 had been returned by November 1945, Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson announced on 20 November that the remaining prisoners "will be entirely out of private contract work, including agriculture, by the end of February, and will be withdrawn from military work by the end of March, 1946," for ultimate repatriation by 1 April.³⁷ At the same time, an agreement was concluded with France in December, whereby the United States would send additional prisoners at the rate of 50,000 a month, and repatriation continued until by June 1946, only 32,000 German POWs remained in the United States. The final boatload of some 1,500 German prisoners from Camp Shanks, New Jersey, sailed for Europe on 22 July 1946, "waving an indifferent farewell," leaving the commander of Camp Shanks, Col. Harry W. Maas, to echo the feeling of the country at large, sighing, "thank God, that is over."³⁸ And with the exception of only 188 Germans, 25 Italians, and 1 Japanese prisoner left in the United States, it was, indeed, over.

WHAT, then, is the final assessment of the American POW experience? There is no question that the government was unprepared for the problem of caring for hundreds of thousands of enemy prisoners. This unpreparedness was quickly complicated by a governmental division of responsibility for the prisoners' camps, maintenance, labor, censorship,

and education, which slowed rather streamlined the experience. Perhaps the chief error was the War Department's failure to isolate incorrigible Nazis from other prisoners, and while a number of programs were later initiated to correct this situation, the fact remains that the United States did little to produce an effective anti-Nazi environment. Regarding the camps themselves, conditions varied so widely from camp to camp that it would be impossible to arrive at an accurate conclusion about the daily welfare of the average POW. Still, the Office of Censorship made a concerted effort to gauge the sentiment and morale of the prisoners by examining POW mail, with the expected variation in results. They ranged from complaints, such as one written from Camp Trinidad, Colorado,

... They transported us like the lowest criminals about which they seem to have plenty of experience in this country.... They fear us "Bad Nazis" so much, but this fear only fills us with pride... conditions here are indescribable and primitive... four of us in a room; no tables or chairs...

to expressions of praise from prisoners in Camp Crossville, Tennessee:

... the food is excellent; this is a marvelous and healthful climate... I am taking courses toward my *Meisterzeugnis* (Certificate of Maturity)... conditions are much better than I expected... I am even taking piano lessons...³⁹

On the positive side, the American POW experience can justifiably boast of its ability to overcome the many obstacles in transporting the enemy prisoners to the United States and to the creation of several

hundred camps throughout the country, with a minimum of military personnel diverted from the war effort. The prisoners were kept healthy and occupied, the latter to the benefit of local businesses, the United States Treasury, and the prisoners themselves. Those interested in "re-education" (those who could successfully side-step the intimidation of their political comrades) were able to benefit from the available programs. Perhaps most importantly, the government's strict adherence to the Geneva Convention constituted an effective propaganda device, insuring similar treatment for American prisoners in Germany; in addition, as pointed out in a report to Congress by the House Military Affairs Committee, the POW policy was "a great factor in breaking down the morale of German troops and making them willing, even eager to surrender... Had this not been true, victory would have been slower and harder and a far greater number of Americans killed."⁴⁰

Although the practical experience gained during the prisoner of war program was of little practical value in the different circumstances posed by the Korean and Viet Nam conflicts, the World War II POW experience, in summary, was not only a reasonably successful experiment in military management, but also a reaffirmation of the value and the flexibility of the Geneva Accords, and perhaps, most importantly, served to provide part of the foundation for a healthier reconstruction of American-German relations in the post-war world. In the words of a former German POW Wilhelm Sauerbrei, who returned to live in Texas after the war, "if there is ever another war, get on the side that America ain't, then get captured by the Americans — you'll have it made."⁴¹

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Arnold P. Krammer is Associate Professor of History at Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. He is author of *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1953*, published by the University of Illinois Press. This article was accepted for publication in July 1975.

1. There is astonishingly little written about the prisoner of war experience in the United States during World War II, though a large amount of raw material may be found in the Records Group 389 of the Modern Military Records Division, and Records Group 211 of the War Manpower Committee in the National Archives in Washington, and the Colonel Stephen Farrand Collection at the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California. The two best available academic studies are Edward Pluth's highly authoritative doctoral dissertation, "The Administration and Operation of German Prisoner of War Camps in the Uni-

ted States During World War II," Ball State University, 1970; and the excellent article by Jake W. Spidle, Jr., "Axis Prisoners of War in the United States, 1942-1946: A Bibliographical Essay," *Military Affairs*, Apr. 1975, 61-66

2. Frank L. Kluckhorn, "Tunisian Resistance Ends in Rout of Germans," *New York Times*, 13 May 1943, 11 July 1944; Beverly Smith, "The Afrika Korps Comes to America," *American Magazine*, Aug. 1943.

3. "Seek German prisoners to Replace Farm Labor," *New York Times*, 13 February 1945.

4. *United States Provost Marshal General's Bureau, Prisoner of War Operations Division*, mimeographed summary. Col. Stephen M. Farrand Collection. For a month-by-month breakdown of incoming prisoners, see *Prisoner of War Circulars*, ASF WD Monthly Progress Report, series 1943, 1945, covered by TH-19-500. Also George Lewis and John Mewha, *History of*

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8. Maxwell S. McKnight, "Employment of Prisoners of War in the United States,"

International Labor Review, July 1944, 49.

9. See memo, Major General, H.Q. Third Service Command, Army Service Forces, Baltimore, 19 Sept. 1944: "Your obligations for furnishing the necessities to prisoners are just as strong as for American personnel." Farrand Collection.

10. Millett, 371.

11. James H. Powers, "What to do with German Prisoners," *Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 1944, 46. According to the *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 Apr. 1944, "Only one officer at Camp Breckenridge speaks German... a situation duplicated at 194 other POW camps."

12. Bernard Gufler, "Indoctrination of German Prisoners of War," Reorientation File, Provost Marshal General Operations.

13. See, for example, an excellent mimeographed manual, covering every aspect of POW life, including regulations on labor, morale, construction of guard towers, machine-gun mounting procedures, sample forms of all varieties, and words of advice from prisoner camps throughout the country, in *Prisoner of War Regional Conferences, 1944*, Office of the Provost Marshal General, Archer L. Lerch, Major General, Farrand Collection.

14. Maxwell S. McKnight, 49.

15. Powers, 46.

16. *New York Times*, 14 Oct. 1943, 13.

17. *House of Representatives*, Investigations of the National War Effort to the Committee on Military Affairs, 12 June 1945, Washington, 8.

18. Even this process involved a number of mistakes, as General Bryan himself admitted. An example which occurred at Fort Devens: "At this camp about 1,300 anti-Nazis were confined in one compound. After approximately two months, four prisoners stated that they were Gestapo agents, and that they had secured all the information they desired about the anti-Nazi prisoner-of-war camp." *Ibid.*, 10.

19. In contrast, the British followed their interrogation program by carefully separating the Germans into "leaders" and "followers." Their success is illustrated by a lengthy study by Henry V. Dicks, Senior Psychiatrist with the British Medical Corps, which indicated that of the POWs tested, 11 percent were fanatical Nazis, 25 percent were near-Nazis, 15 percent were passive anti-Nazis, 9 percent were actively anti-Nazi, and the large plurality, 40 percent, were nonpolitical. The British au-

thorities immediately isolated the 36 percent Nazi-related prisoners and enjoyed excellent success in curtailing Nazi influence and propaganda within the camps. Henry V. Dicks, "Personality Traits and National Socialist Ideology," *Human Relations*, June 1950, 120.

20. The Farrand Collection contains many U.S. Army Signal Corps photographs of the barracks at POW Camp Forrest, Tennessee, a number of which inadvertently show framed photos of Adolf Hitler above several prisoners' bunks.

21. *New York Times*, 30 Nov. 1944.

22. P. W. Friedrich W. Schultz to Major Mins, Executive Officer Camp Campbell, Kentucky, 29 Nov. 1944. Farrand Collection.

23. See, for example, William Shirer's scathing article in the *Washington Post*, 20 Aug. 1944; "Nazi Prisoners are Nazis Still," *New York Times Magazine*, 21 Nov. 1943; Reinhold Pabel, "It's Easy to Bluff Americans," *Colliers*, 16 May 1953.

24. Letter from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to Prof. Warren A. Seavey, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 11 May 1944, WDGAP 383.6.

25. Memo, John Brown Mason, War Problems Division, "Memorandum of the Swiss Legation on the Introduction of the Nazi Salute in Prisoner of War Camps as the New German Military Salute." 11 Aug. 1944. Farrand Collection.

26. Sidney B. Fay, "German Prisoners of War," *Current History*, Mar. 1945, 194, also John Brown Mason, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," *American Journal of International Law*, Apr. 1945, 198; M.I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz, "Trends in Wehrmacht Morale," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, X, 1946, 78-84.

27. *New York Times*, 18 Jan. 1945. See also, "Army Probes 'Suicides' at Prison Camp for Germans," *PM*, 13 Jan. 1944; "Nazis Beat U.S. Captive," *New York Times*, 15 Aug. 1945. On 23 February 1944, the *New York German language newspaper Neue Volkszeitung* noted that "the Nazis are organized in the camps throughout America... and have even established gestapo units."

28. The Army's summary of its investigation concluded that the violence and terrorism had ended, implying, quite erroneously, that Nazi influence in the camps had ceased as well. "Prison Camps Rid of Nazi Terrorism," *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 1945.

29. J. Edgar Hoover, "Enemies at Large" *American Magazine*, Apr. 1944, 97. Also "Eight Nazis Escape in Michigan," *New York Times*, 10 July 1944; "Says Nazis Run Wild in Arizona Streets," *New York Times*, 13 Feb. 1945.

30. U.S. Congress, *House of Representatives, Congressional Record: Appendix*, 79th Congress, 1st Sess., 22 Feb. 1945, A786; "Laxity Led to Escape of German Prisoners," *New York Times*, 8 Apr. 1945.

31. Curt Bondy, "Observation and Re-education of German POWs," *Harvard Educational Review*, Jan. 1946, 12-17; "Democratizing Germans," *Science News Letter*, 9 Nov. 1946, 293; "Re-educating the Nazis," *America*, 26 Aug. 1944, 515.

32. Powers, 49.

33. Quentin Reynolds, "Experiment in Democracy," *Colliers*, 25 May 1946, 12. In addition to the reeducation program, the POWs were allowed, through an arrangement between the War Department, the German Red Cross, and The Reich Ministry for Science, Instruction and Education, to pursue their formal educations by proxy at any of a long list of German polytechnic, mining, textile, and business universities. A small number of POWs were also enrolled in extension courses through the University of California, Berkeley; the University of Minnesota; the University of Chicago; and the University of Wisconsin.

34. Reynolds, 13.

35. "Prisoner Problems," editorial, *Washington Post*, 24 Apr. 1945.

36. "Reich Prisoners Here Told of Surrender," *New York Times*, 4 May 1945; "The Nation: Enough Nazis," *Newsweek*, 21 May 1945, 38.

37. War Department Press Release, 20 Nov. 1945; "War Captives in U.S. to be Gone by Spring; Total of Prisoners Here is put at 417,034," *New York Times*, 13 Sept. 1945.

38. "Camp Shanks Ends War Mission as Last German PWs Start Home," *New York Times*, 23 July 1946; "Last of Supermen," *Newsweek*, 5 Aug. 1946.

39. A large collection of such excerpts from the Office of Censorship, with the names of senders and recipients, are located in the Farrand Collection.

40. U.S. Congress, *House of Representatives, Investigations of the National War Effort to the Committee on Military Affairs*, 12 June 1945, 19.

41. Bryan (Texas) *Eagle*, 14 Oct. 1973.